

## **Driving Innovation**

For all the talk on innovation and what inspires it, the bottom line, as Steve Jobs and the performance of Apple as he has come and gone and come again demonstrates, is that innovation is all about people. The process that initiates innovation is imagination, edged forward by competition, profit motives, and pride. The success of innovation, however, is reliant almost solely on the capacity of the people involved to be creative, and the ability of their leadership to enable and embrace their efforts. Once an innovation has been generated its successful introduction into the marketplace is also a function of courage, as every great innovation has had to battle its share of naysayers and devil's advocates.

If people are the core of the innovative process then gaining insight into how to drive innovation is a function of understanding the dynamics and personalities of the process.

### **The Dynamics of Innovation**

Change is never an easy force to introduce and integrate into an organization, and innovation by definition is a driver of change. This fundamental fact of business life dictates that the innovation process be as complicated as change. This means that for every effort at innovation there will be a countering effort to squash it by people within the organization who for some reason feel threatened or challenged by the change. The conflicting interests place pressure on management, as they are forced to measure the potential value of the innovation against the current value of the opposing force.

In order for innovation to thrive management has the obligation to develop, nurture and sustain an environment that permits creativity to explore and experiment and engage without restrictions and barriers. Management needs to set the example, and demand compliance throughout the corporate ranks, in supporting, applauding, and promoting innovations that show promise. Consistent with this, management must serve to ostracize and minimize all people who try to inhibit or constrain the innovative process, making sure that narrow, parochial interests and petty fears do not serve to quash an exciting new development.

### **The Personalities of Innovation**

Just as being a novelist or songwriter is not for everyone who knows how to write or strum a guitar, being an innovator is not for everyone who concocts a new idea. There are some experts in the literature (psychology and business) that claim innovators fall under a number of different categories, from revolutionaries to explorers. Extracting from the literature, Tudog presents 5 personalities of innovation. They are:

1. The Compulsive Seeker of Knowledge – this innovator is driven by a compulsive need to understand the world, leading to the development of new ideas as new information becomes understood. Moreover, this type of individual is so intent on understanding his/her environment that he/she innovates new things to fill the gap in his/her understanding. If there are aspects of work or play that this individual senses is missing, their compulsion is to develop something to fill the gap.
2. The Team Player – this innovator is a master at bringing people and ideas together and finding the balance between them, allowing for synergies to be exploited while differences are set aside. This type of person has a passion for the development of new

ideas in a group environment and has a special skill in working with people and allowing them to sense their freedom of thought while gently molding the direction of their innovative thoughts. Although not necessarily a leader, this person has the ability to make everyone feel comfortable and motivated.

3. The Challenged – this innovator has been challenged either intellectually or emotionally to develop a distinctive idea. The challenge may have come from an external agent like a teacher, friend or family member, or may be a function of an internal commitment. There are times too when the challenge is a result of a competitive event, whereby the individual is driven by a strong desire to surpass the innovative accomplishments of a friend or rival.

4. The Leader – this innovator is driven by a need to lead and typically has the skills and personal qualities that make for good leadership. A creative person with an ability to envision new possibilities and share and excite others about their visions, the leader is an excellent blend of creative and business skills.

5. The Genius – this innovator is simply brilliant, able to notice pieces of the world missing and discovering ways to correct the omission. The genius is someone who not only sees possibilities but also has the skills to develop whatever is needed to exploit the possibility.

Innovation is the engine of progress. It is to be encouraged in every enterprise because it is what ultimately provides companies with the distinctiveness they need to compete and secure strong relationships with the customers. Innovation is also the key to our growth as new capabilities are discovered enabling us to reach new heights and experience new joys. Whether they are medical in nature, or new entertainment technologies, innovation is what enriches life. Driving innovation is as rewarding as it is essential.